

**OPENING STATEMENT OF**  
**THE HONORABLE SHERWOOD L. BOEHLERT**  
**CHAIRMAN**  
**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Preliminary Report  
Wednesday May 5, 2004  
10 a.m. to 12 a.m.  
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

I want to welcome everyone here today, but I want to give a special welcome to Admiral Watkins and his team. Our nation has turned repeatedly to Admiral Watkins for creativity and leadership on a wide range of issues, and once again, he has risen to the occasion with energy, open-mindedness, thoughtfulness and the most comprehensive approach possible. Admiral, we are in your debt.

The Ocean Commission had before it a Herculean task – or perhaps our reference should be to Poseidon. The oceans not only cover most of the Earth's surface, they serve us as playground and food source and, sadly, sometimes as dumping ground; they help determine our climate and our security. We are land-dwelling creatures, but we are utterly dependent on the oceans, and more and more of our nation's citizens live near a coastline.

Yet while the oceans lap daily at our shores, they only intermittently lap at our consciousness. We still take the oceans for granted, even as they are increasingly troubled by over-development, over-fishing, climate change, and other human insults. Worse still, perhaps, we don't even know all that much about the oceans – certainly not as much as we'd like to properly identify, diagnose and remedy problems.

The Ocean Commission report should bring focused attention to this predicament for the first time in decades. I don't think anyone can disagree with the basic thrust of this report that more needs to be done to understand, manage and take advantage of the world's oceans, and doing so will take new thinking and new money.

I have to say that message is especially timely as the Congress, and this Committee in particular, reviews proposals to embark on a new space exploration mission. I support that effort, but as I've said before, I think it's more important to know more about our own planet than it is to know about Mars. Happily, I don't think we have to make an either/or choice, but we do have to set priorities, and I think that it's more important to study the water that's still visible and that we rely on.

Setting and implementing those priorities is going to take some work. And there's only so much the Commission can do in that regard. I'm reminded of a famous exchange in Shakespeare's Henry IV in which Glendower brags, "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." Hotspur replies, "So can any man. But do they come when you do call them?" The Commission can call for changes, but it can't bring them into being. That task belongs, in the first instance, to the Congress.

That's why we're having today's hearing, and why we wanted to hear from a variety of experts. We have plenty of issues to raise with our panel because, while the Commission's general thrust is unarguable, the specific recommendations raise a lot of questions.

Let me just list a few of them that I hope we can discuss today.

The first and most obvious concerns money. Can the nation afford the increases in ocean R&D being suggested, given other demands, even within science. Regardless of how much money is available, how should we set priorities for spending. That's a key question and one on which the report offers little guidance. And does it make sense to set up a "trust fund" from oil royalties given the relatively unhappy experience with the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the unlikelihood of any new mandatory spending?

We also have questions related to government organization. Do we need a new structure for oceans in the White House? How would such an entity interact with organizations like the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Council on Environmental Quality, which must deal with oceans as part of their own cross-cutting responsibilities?

Another set of questions. Should responsibilities that now reside with other agencies be transferred into NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)? I have to say that I am always skeptical of such moves, which need to have a big payoff to make up for the disruption they cause.

And, finally, I am fully behind the Commission suggestion that Congress write an Organic Act for NOAA, and, indeed, the staff has been working on such a bill for months with Chairman Ehlers. I'd like some guidance today on precisely what such a bill should and should not contain. I would hope that we could have hearings on an Organic Act in June or July.

So we have our work cut out for us, thanks to the hard work the Commission has already put in. I look forward to having a conversation with all our witnesses today so that we can get some specific guidance on how to turn the Commission's exhortations into policy.